

VZCZCXRO9105  
PP RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR  
DE RUEHAD #0243/01 0721725  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 131725Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2239  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 8193  
RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 0712

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000243

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP, NEA/RA

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [ELAB](#) [KMPI](#) [KTIP](#) [AE](#)  
SUBJECT: UAE TIP SHELTER OPTIONS INADEQUATE BUT THERE IS HOPE

REFS: A) 07 ABU DHABI 1272, B) 07 DUBAI 629, C) 08 ABU DHABI 377, D)  
08 ABU DHABI 135

ABU DHABI 00000243 001.2 OF 002

Sensitive but unclassified.

¶1. (U) This is a joint Embassy Abu Dhabi - Consulate General Dubai cable.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: UAE shelter options for victims of domestic abuse and trafficking (sexual or otherwise) remain limited. In Dubai, there is only one officially recognized facility of whose existence the wider Dubai community knows very little. In Abu Dhabi, the only officially-recognized shelter has yet to formally open and there is virtually no awareness of its existence other than media reports that allude to a new shelter. Public awareness of both the shelters ranges from limited at best to virtually non-existent; even among those providing victim services, knowledge of the shelters available is sorely lacking. The managers of all shelters recognize the need for facilities for women and children, but no facilities cater to men. Shelter options appear inadequate relative to the scale and complexity of the problem. (Septel will address non-official shelters in the UAE.) End summary.

¶3. (U) In preparation for the 2008 report on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and in an effort to assess the services available to victims of domestic violence and trafficking, PolOffs visited the only two official shelters in the UAE.

-----  
THE ONLY OFFICIAL SHELTER IN DUBAI:  
WELL APPOINTED BUT NOT SO WELCOMING  
-----

¶4. (SBU) The Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWC)--established by the Dubai Government in 2007--operates the only officially recognized shelter for female and minor victims of domestic abuse and trafficking (ref A). Although there have been a number of aesthetic changes to the DFWC since EmbOffs' previous visits (ref B), the facility creates both physical and emotional barriers to entry: management argues that the security guards and razor wire (partly carried over from the facility's previous role as a mandatory drug rehab center) physically protect victims from abusers; the blindingly white walls present a stark almost severe exterior although efforts have been made to make the interior warmer; the large facility (can easily house 200) is more institutional in appearance than it is comfortably homey. However, austere physical appearances aside, the facility is well appointed and immaculately maintained.

¶5. (SBU) EmbOffs experienced first-hand how the bureaucracy associated with entering the facility hinders the shelter's accessibility. DFWC staff asked EmbOffs to sign paperwork that, as expected, asked visitors to respect the confidentiality of the

residents, but went further to codify what could and could not be discussed within the shelter. The vetting and intake process for potential residents is even more bureaucratic and could add to the victims' distress. Any would-be resident is required to submit to police questioning (and police referrals are a primary intake source). Shelter management and police may perceive this as harmless and relevant to investigations, but it is potentially traumatic for victims afraid of law enforcement authorities and unsure of the true purpose of the interrogation.

¶6. (SBU) PolOffs discovered through a series of conversations around Dubai that awareness of the shelter and its services was limited. Of consulates from 14 labor-sending countries which we contacted, five (China, Russia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan) had no knowledge of the shelter; three (Eritrea, Ukraine, and Belarus) were aware of but had no contact with the shelter; three (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan) were aware of and referred people to the shelter; and three (India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines) were aware of the shelter but preferred to accommodate victims in their own ad hoc, dedicated shelters. This poll of consulates suggests that the general community is even less aware of the DFWC shelter's existence, calling into question the DFWC's claims that their shelter is widely known in the target community and easy to access. (Post has recommended that the National anti-TIP committee conduct a diplomatic briefing to spread awareness of shelter services.) The shelter's literature advertises a helpline for victims to call when in need of assistance; however, when Embassy staff made seven attempts at different times of day over a period of three days, the line was only answered once.

-----  
THE ONLY OFFICIAL SHELTER IN ABU DHABI:  
COZY BUT POTENTIALLY BUREAUCRATIC  
-----

ABU DHABI 00000243 002.2 OF 002

¶7. (SBU) Abu Dhabi is due to open its first shelter for women and children (ref D). Established under the patronage of Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, the widow of the late founder of the UAE, the new facility will cater only to women and children who are victims of trafficking, not victims of domestic violence. Although the shelter has not officially opened, it has already accepted two women, one of whom is currently resident and one already repatriated to her home country of Uzbekistan.

¶8. (SBU) Unlike its Dubai counterpart, the physical appearance of the Abu Dhabi shelter is warm and accommodating (essentially a renovated family villa). The villa's small exterior belies its capacity to house 40 women comfortably in single bedrooms, each with nearby bathrooms. It is evident that tremendous care has gone into the aesthetics of the building. While there are bureaucratic barriers to accessing the Abu Dhabi shelter (it will accept referrals from some churches and perhaps embassies, but also from the police), women will reportedly be encouraged to file cases with the police after the shelter has ensured that their rights will be protected. (The shelter proprietor was clearly protective of her future wards' individual rights.) Secrecy surrounding the location of the villa (to protect privacy and prevent abusers from stalking victims) may also limit access to the services of the shelter. Like the DFWC, the Abu Dhabi shelter offers a comprehensive menu of services including legal advice, psychological care, medical care, recreational therapy, and skills training. The management of the shelter intends to perform trend analyses on victim profiles in order to lay the foundation for a more comprehensive approach to the country's anti-TIP efforts. The shelter's budget will be fully funded for the first three years of operation by the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) The establishment of the Abu Dhabi shelter, expected to open shortly, is yet another acknowledgement that trafficking is a real problem in the UAE and its services are needed. In that respect, it reflects a positive move in the country's anti-TIP efforts and should be encouraged to develop user-friendly tactics and

broad community outreach. The focus of the much more established facility in Dubai, the DFWC, on best practices and international standards, while laudable, risks perfection becoming the enemy of the good, with a potential loss of the human touch and too few beneficiaries from the community it was established to serve. Additionally, the fact that no shelters currently address the needs of male trafficking victims indicates that the complexity of the TIP problem in the UAE has yet to be fully addressed. (Even representatives from the largest male labor-sending countries -- India and Pakistan -- apparently fail to see the need for facilities that cater to men.) End comment.

OLSON